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# **Activating Peer Support: A Strategic Resource for Quality Enhancement in the Teaching Practicum**

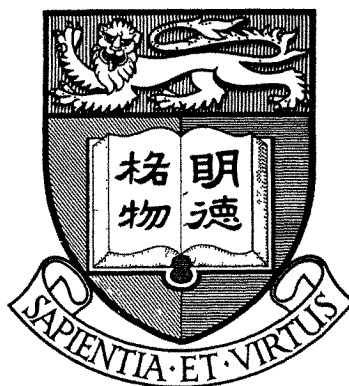
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# **Activating Peer Support**

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**Foreword:**  
**Becoming Critical Friends**

In recent years, the literature on teacher education and education generally has focused increasingly on building communities of learners. Policymakers call for schools to become true learning communities. Researchers assert that students learn more effectively when engaged in collaborative learning with their peers and teachers. Teachers are challenged to engage in critical reflection on their pedagogy. Even teachers in faculties of education are called upon to become more community-minded in their practice. What is driving this focus on learning communities? What are its fundamental assumptions? Most important, how does one go about doing it?

The rhetoric about learning communities is built on several key ideas. One is the notion that knowledge is constructed by the learner rather than given by an expert. Another is that learning entails a highly complex process of accessing information, reflecting on it, gaining insight, and then acting. A third is that collective inquiry is more elaborate, insightful, and rich than solitary enquiry. We learn best through collaboration. When new teachers systematically and thoughtfully reflect, analyse, and probe their knowledge with others, they engage in a process of dialogue that has the potential to improve their practice substantially. Such processes are built on trust, openness, keen observation, and respect. They stand in stark contrast to the 'culture of judgment' articulated by Dr. Kwo that prevails in all educational organizations. Instead, such processes strive to create 'communities of critical friends' (Rallis & Rossman, in press)<sup>1</sup>. Critical friends are supportive yet challenging. They empathise while holding out new possibilities; they help uncover assumptions driving actions; they foster our own insights and learning. And they do so without judging.

How is all this accomplished? As so thoughtfully described in this manual, creating a learning community of critical friends entails action research: the cycle of planning, acting, observing, critically reflecting, and then making mid-course adjustments or planning small-scale 'experiments' to test new insights about practice. Information is crucial to this deliberative dialogue, hence the emphasis on gathering detailed data on practice. As beginning teachers gather information about their own and their peers' practice, they become more skilled. This information, then, becomes the content for reflection, analysis, critical insights, and improved practice.

This guide for students in the teaching practicum is an invaluable resource for beginning teachers, as well as those who serve with them. The principles articulated by Dr. Kwo, based on her extensive experience fostering the growth and development of novice teachers, are clear, practical, and well-founded in theory. The acronym POND captures the salient elements of critical friendship among teachers, as well as principles of learning that transcend age and culture. The manual is, moreover, filled with specific exercises and activities designed to foster individual and collective learning.

This manual is a highly creative, thoughtful resource for practicum and novice teachers, as well as for those who work with them in various capacities. Creating communities of learners who have the commitment and skill to be true critical friends is extraordinarily challenging. As educators, we are asking ourselves and those we serve to develop the 'habits of mind and heart' (Rossman & Rallis, 1998)<sup>2</sup> that will encourage a generation of ethical, thoughtful, and courageous young people. They deserve no less. Dr. Kwo's manual serves as an exemplary guide for this journey.

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Visitor, Spring 1999  
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<sup>1</sup>Rallis, S. F., & Rossman, G. B. (in press). *Collaborative Inquiry: Evaluator as Critical Friend*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

<sup>2</sup>Rossman, G. B., & Rallis, S. F. (1998). *Learning in the Field: An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.



## **INTRODUCTION: CHALLENGES IN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING**

Teaching practicum for student teachers is a critical period, during which the integration of theory and practice is expected to take place, under the guidance of university supervisors and the school-site support of collaborating teachers. However, the effect of the conventional structure of the teaching practicum has been a concern amongst teacher educators (e.g. Stones, 1987; Calderhead, 1987; Alexander, Muir and Chant, 1992). Guidance is mostly limited to occasional supervisory observation and post-lesson discussion, and much of the student teachers' time in extended practice goes without guidance. Challenges to both teacher educators and student teachers include:

1. How do student teachers synthesize learning experiences from course work and field experience?
2. What support do student teachers need in the process of professional learning?
3. How do student teachers reach a stage that the challenges in teaching can be met with a sense of self-efficacy?
4. How do student teachers strengthen themselves to move beyond survival and become educators?

Teacher education in Hong Kong is largely institutionalised in the conventional structure. One possible new direction lies in the venture into partnership with schools, by creating a mentoring force in the teaching profession so as to provide closer and more frequent professional supervision to student teachers. While this can eventually necessitate curriculum reform and changes in resource distributions, the initial challenge will be setting up a dialogue on professional concerns in narrowing the gap between the worlds of universities and schools. It will take time and effort to build a common vision and shared understanding of the professional roles of university supervisors and school collaborating teachers. Meanwhile, on-site school support to student teachers comes from good will; yet the collaborating teachers may feel uneasy about how to offer professional help to enhance student teachers' development, even with richness in experience and expertise in classroom teaching.

While school-university partnership is being explored for increasing support of student teachers, student teachers are natural partners for each other. Research literature has indicated that collaboration in the form of peer coaching is effective in breaking teacher isolation (Little, 1982) and in helping teachers to apply new skills and strategies in their classroom (Joyce and Showers, 1988). Literature also shows that peer coaching can promote collegiality and professionalism (Brandt, 1989; Neubert and Binko, 1992). Student teachers can be seen as a major source of mutual support for the enhancement of professional learning.

This document is presented on the basis of an action project funded by the University Grants Committee's Action Learning Project. As the primary readers are student teachers, it is written in an interactive style as a professional discourse. It aims to activate peer support as a culture in teacher education by preparing student teachers to adopt a peer coaching system in the teaching practicum. It focuses on the promotion of reflectivity and action learning by helping student teachers to develop skills in rapport-building classroom observation and conferencing with each other, as teacher and as peer coach. The philosophy and skills under discussion are relevant to student teachers across different subject disciplines. The suggestions may be of interest to mentoring teachers and school principals who are involved in staff development work.

## **SECTION I: CREATING THE FRAMEWORK AND CULTURE FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING**

- **Identifying Ourselves as Learners**
- **Building a Positive Frame for Professional Learning**
- **Facing the Traditional Culture of Learning to Teach**
- **Towards a Sharing Culture in Professional Learning**

### **Identifying Ourselves as Learners**

In preparing students to enter a teaching career, I have been continually struggling with some disturbing observation of the gap between the educational assertions in university course work and the alternative world of school practice! In our respective roles, as teacher educators, student teachers and teachers, even when we all are working hard within our system, how do we look at the impact of our work? This question can be addressed by considering ourselves as learners in various contexts of our past, current and future experiences.

#### **Learning Log** ✍

1. Recall your days as a secondary school student. Describe two incidents of learning through intensive hard work, one of which you enjoyed, and one of which you disliked.
2. Recall your days as an undergraduate student. Describe two incidents of learning through intensive hard work, one of which you enjoyed, and one of which you disliked.

#### **Group Discussion:**

1. Have your motivation and approaches to learning changed over the years? If so, how?
2. In what ways did your teachers influence your motivation and approaches to learning?

### Becoming Aware of Our Goals and Teaching Beliefs

Teaching, though appearing to be technically oriented, is much more complex than a set of procedures rationally planned. It is a representation of the teacher's educational philosophy. A teacher's observable teaching acts are rooted in the belief system attributed to personal growth and many years of experiences as a learner. If we look closely at the interfaces between school and university and between university and school, we may find different cycles of our learning dynamics: some virtuous and some vicious, to a large extent related to our educational environment within which interaction with our respective teachers has been significant.

Referring to Marton and Saljo's (1976) theory of surface and deep learning, I can see two types of learning cycles. To what extent are they associated with the teacher's beliefs and actions? To be prepared for teaching, you will have to learn to become more conscious of your beliefs by

considering your past experiences as learners. With active confrontation, such beliefs are no longer stagnant, but develop in a continual process through your conscious choices of teaching actions and active reflections for validation.

## **Building a Positive Frame for Professional Learning**

Teaching and learning do not take place in idealized settings. There are various types of problems which challenge our teaching beliefs. Our positive values which we once committed to can be shattered if we only focus on our limitations.

### **Learning Log ✍**

1. Who are student teachers / teachers accountable to? Are there any conflicting demands on them?
2. List three pedagogical principles you hold as most important, from your past experience in teaching practicum, describe the constraints in reality which seem to inhibit your implementation of these principles. What can you do about these constraints?

### Commitment to Tackle Problems

People generally do not like to look into problems, if they can help it. A demoralizing tendency could be an engagement in futile attempts in identifying the culprits who are responsible for the blames. It would be more helpful to see all of us as part of the problems and part of the solutions. Rather than struggling with a sense of helplessness, we must learn to work in persistence to tackle our share of the problems. The goal here is to identify what we can do in our individual roles and circumstances. With commitment to look into educational problems and address them in our respective positions, we can do something about improving education for our younger generation.

### The Significance of Problems in Practicum

The commitment to tackle problems should begin in this initial stage of your professional learning. Rather than avoiding problems, it would be much more constructive to confront them and take your attempts in tackling them as signposts for your professional development. For a start, you must be prepared to enter practicum with open attitudes, and learn to be:

- ready to accept the complexity of teaching.
- open to learn from both successful and less successful experiences.
- ready to address problems, and accept them as *essential* part of learning;
- ready to explore puzzles when efforts are not congruent to outcomes.
- open to take peers, collaborating teachers and university supervisors as resources for learning;
- open to broaden the experience beyond the classroom (e.g. understand the school system and school culture).
- able to consider agendas for professional development with individual identification of priorities.

## Quality Enhancement in the Teaching Practicum

It is important for you to develop a sense of progress by bringing together your course work and practicum experience. You learn from the amount of effort you put in! In order to enhance the quality of learning, you need to organise your work agenda and develop a support structure for yourselves. Some guidelines are suggested here.

### **Work Agenda**

#### **1. Independent Reading and Planning-Teaching-Evaluation:**

A lighter teaching load is given for your practicum so that you can have sufficient time to prepare fully before entering the class. It is important that *every lesson is planned* with consideration of lesson objectives, purposes and linkages between activities, estimation of time distribution, as well as knowledge of learners from evaluation of former lessons. A well-planned lesson not only brings more spontaneity in your interaction with students in classroom teaching, but also sensitizes your own evaluation of whether and how the objectives have been fulfilled. Try to learn from cycles of planning-teaching-evaluation as processes of clarifying your understanding of the material, integrating and applying your linguistic and pedagogical knowledge to *facilitation of learning*. To enhance theory-practice integration, you need to refer to your curriculum files and background reading. Independent reading is an essential part of your work agenda.

#### **2. Programme Planning and Time Management:**

You are recommended to develop an overview of your teaching schedule, various commitments to the school, and the assignment of classroom action research. Time-management is always a critical challenge for a teacher. Do try to train yourself for time management in your practicum. Your Teaching Practice Log File should be organised with attention to programme-planning, and related to your Portfolio of Professional Learning and Development (PPLD).

### **Support Structure**

#### **1. Students' Feedback**

Students' responses provide a most valuable source for your teaching improvement. Try to be observant of their achievements and problems, progress or lack of progress. You can also endeavour to solicit feedback formally or informally on different occasions of your practicum, and build your understanding of their needs into your further planning.

#### **2. Supervisory Support**

Within your school, you will have supervisory visits from your practicum supervisor, and in some cases, a collaborating or mentoring teacher. You may be jointly observed by your practicum supervisor and the collaborating/mentoring teacher. This will take place through your liaison, when you have developed a trusting rapport with them. Try to use your visitors as resources of your learning by taking initiative to raise questions on your practicum and where appropriate, your assignment, and address them together.

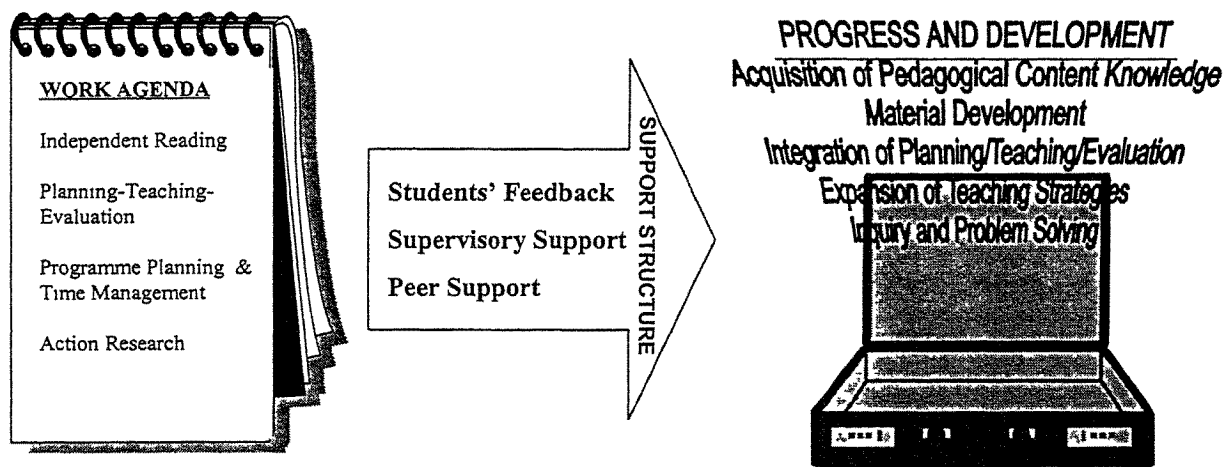
#### **3. Peer Support**

Professional sharing with your peers from different schools is most valuable to widen your scope of thinking. Do take advantage of the electronic and phone network to activate your problem-solving skills. Your peer partner placed in the same school is your immediate learning support, but you have to learn to make peer coaching an effective support for you. This document aims to prepare you for this dimension of support for one another.

## Learning Log ✍

Considering the Figure *Challenges and Rewards in Professional Learning*, what can you do to develop a support structure to ensure effective implementation of the work agenda for progress and development?

### *Challenges and Rewards in Professional Learning*



## Facing the Traditional Culture of Learning to Teach

Supervisory visits necessitate classroom observation. It is important to address the long-standing tradition that classroom observation has been mostly a judgemental exercise on the one being observed. The evaluation tends to be narrowly focused on the teacher's performance with an assumption that good teaching performance will lead to learning. Within this tradition, you are likely to see the teaching practicum as a stressful period during which you are observed and assessed, so as to reach a satisfactory standard to merit the professional qualification.

Teaching practicum as a process of learning to teach can be neglected when evaluation has to rely heavily on the infrequent observation of student teachers. It has been widely acknowledged in research that teaching is more complicated than a proficient demonstration of desirable teaching skills, and learning to teach requires a process of experimentation and learning from mistakes rather than a narrow focus on an occasional good "show" to the observers. Further concerns include what happens in between the infrequent observations and how student teachers can continually develop themselves. To ensure continuity in the process of learning to teach throughout the practicum, student teachers as peers to each other provide a valuable source of on-site support. This dimension of support can be regarded as a strategic resource for the teaching practicum, in addition to the support from collaborating teachers and university teachers.

## Workshop: Peer Coaching – Benefits or Problems?

Consider the list *Student-Teachers' Views on the Benefits and Problems of Peer-coaching*, which is based on responses gathered from previous student teachers. It is very likely that you will face similar questions, and perhaps more, in the process of planning and proceeding with the peer coaching sessions during your practicum.

This exercise is intended to help you to identify clearly the real problems and the real benefits. It is also intended to empower you to work out solutions to some recurring problems, instead of getting sucked into them. Hopefully, you can maximise the benefits of this new culture.

Task 1: Reorganise the views into two lists – “benefits” and “problems” (use the numbers).

Task 2: Identify three major problems and discuss what you think you could do to solve or minimise them.

Task 3: Identify three major benefits and discuss how you can create conditions for harvesting these benefits.

### *Student-Teachers' Views on the Benefits and Problems of Peer Coaching*

1. *As an observer, one can observe and learn from the teacher's strengths and weaknesses.*
2. *The teacher being observed can learn about students' performance/learning progress and his/her own performance from observer's recorded data and comments.*
3. *The supportive spirit in teacher collaboration is vital in professional learning.*
4. *It is difficult to build up trust when peers are unfamiliar with each other, and have little prior collaborating experience at university.*
5. *A closer relationship between student teachers can be reached when peers work out a mutually supportive system.*
6. *Interpersonal skills can be enhanced through discussion and negotiation.*
7. *Through sharing of ideas between peers in lesson planning, we can learn more about material development and anticipation of learning problems.*
8. *Heavy workload: We may not have time to give comments and conduct frequent classroom observation given that we have to catch up with the teaching schedule specified by the school teachers within the teaching practicum period.*
9. *The peer coach is very positive, but not critical enough to help me reach new dimensions of my awareness.*
10. *Learning to listen and consider other's opinions is important for personal growth and for becoming a teacher.*
11. *Medium of communication: Using English in discussion sometimes hinders the scope of interaction and expression.*

12. *Misunderstanding between peers is painful.*
13. *Objective evaluation of the teacher's performance is difficult from the peer observer's perspective.*
14. *The peer observer provides details of students' activities and information that the teacher may have neglected when busy teaching. It is valuable to gain feedback from the peer observer's observation notes.*
15. *Poor conferencing skills can lead to destructive rapport between peers: it is most challenging to resolve conflicts/disagreement.*
16. *Post-observation discussion helps clarify lesson planning and design rationale, and generate more ideas and alternatives to improve teaching.*
17. *Peer coaching may add pressure and workload to the tight teaching schedule.*
18. *The coaching process requires the peer observer to perform counter-thinking from the students' perspectives. It is insightful to promote a sense of responsibility, effective task-design and efficient lesson organisation.*
19. *School culture: Some school teachers are unfamiliar with the peer coaching practice and see it as "strange".*
20. *It is often embarrassing to point out a peer's English mistakes.*

## **Towards a Sharing Culture in Professional Learning**

In the broader political structures within which the teaching profession is contextualized, the traditional judgmental culture tends to be reinforced by various appraisal systems for institutions and individuals (e.g. Quality Assurance Inspectorate, language benchmarking for teachers). Underlying the assessments is anticipation of professional development. However, development does not often take place as a logical response to well-intended policies. Development often takes place as instances of change in processes of risk-taking and learning from mistakes within a supportive and nurturing culture. Building such a culture is not natural, but requires strategic effort in turning schools into learning organisations. As asserted by Fullan (1993), quality learning for all students depend on quality learning for all teachers. The corollary is that better teachers are better learners.

### **Building a Learning Community and the 'POND' Culture**

Teacher education must aim at preparing a new generation of teachers who can work together beyond isolated struggles. In order for teaching practicum to move against a judgmental culture as a genuine process of professional learning, a learning community should be built up amongst university supervisors, collaborating teachers and student teachers as peers for one another. A sharing culture is needed for breaking the isolation of teaching, and opening the classroom doors for joint experimentation. This learning community should set out to address problems as opportunities for learning, with joint inquiries into effects of teaching acts. Such joint inquiries can become a powerful learning force. Through shared reflections and active interaction with a common focus on identified problems, relationships become symmetrical in co-learning. Instead of

asking for or providing judgmental feedback on the observed teacher's performance, members of the learning community focus on a different question:

### **What do we learn together about effective teaching?**

The highlights of this new culture and the patterns of professional discourse can be summarized with the acronym 'POND'.

- **P**roblem-based in the learning process.
- **O**pen sharing, with the ground rule of mutual support.
- **N**on-judgemental in an overall sense.
- **D**irection-oriented with recognition of individual pace of development.

The significance of the **POND** culture will be elaborated in the following sections. Section II will prepare you to support each other as peers in the **P**roblem-based learning cycles, whereas Section III will focus on the **O**pen sharing and the **N**on-judgmental feedback which are essential practice for rapport-building. Finally, Section IV will present a framework for a **D**irection-oriented process of professional learning and relate it to peer coaching.



## **SECTION II: GENERATING PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING CYCLES FOR ACTION RESEARCH**

- **Professional Learning and Classroom Action Research**
- **Approach to Classroom Action Research**
- **Setting up a Schedule for Peer Coaching**
- **An Illustration of Action Learning Cycles with Peer Support**

### **Professional Learning and Classroom Action Research**

#### **Learning Log**

What is the meaning of classroom action research?

Traditional research has been criticized as verbose and general to teachers, and its jargons as a barrier to sharing understanding. Instead of separating the academic researcher (as the outsider-observer) from the teacher-researcher (as the actor), there can be close collaboration between the two through classroom action research. Even at a personal level (without any collaboration), classroom action research helps the teacher to structure the teaching experience for the development of self-awareness, sensitivity to learning and teaching effectiveness. By integrating action and reflection, the teacher can focus on selected problems and extend strategies in tackling them.

As a process of learning through actions and reflections, classroom action research is not product-oriented. Such action learning may be summed up as 'reflective practice' (Schon, 1983). Reflection is the observation and evaluation of one's own actions through a conceptual framework, which leads to changed decision-making. It is reflection that turns the novice teacher into the expert.

As put by Biggs and Lam (1997), if product-oriented research is to provide the fish for today's meal, action learning might be seen as the net that provides a continuing supply of educational fish. Essential ingredients of action learning are thus suggested as:

1. The main aim is to improve current practice.
2. The researchers are participants, not outsiders brought in to propose expert solutions, and the topic is decided by the participants.
3. The driving conceptual process is reflection on the part of the participants in terms of a theory that provides the pivot for change. Action learning is systematic, involving the cycle: reflect, plan, act, observe, reflect on the results, and so on into cycle two.
4. It is sometimes necessary to facilitate the reflective and other processes necessary for action learning by using a resource person, or 'critical friend', who may adopt various roles including adviser, theorist, critic, source of technical information and so on.

#### **Learning Log**

From your understanding, what is the significance of classroom action research in the initial stage of professional learning as a student teacher?

## Approach to Classroom Action Research

Classroom action research involves studies of what goes on in classrooms which can lead to effective and practical action. It presupposes an approach to teaching which depends on learning from students rather than merely transmitting knowledge to them. A primary aim is to try to grasp the learners' viewpoints on their learning of the subject matter. As teachers, we can then use this vantage point to review our own understanding of the subject matter. The action research is therefore a process in relating knowledge to learners through problem-solving.

### Identification of a Problem

In becoming a reflective practitioner, you will become alert to problems around you. Some of the problems may be rooted in the macro-structure of the school system, whereas a substantive number are related to your planning and interaction with students at this novice stage of your professional learning. For your classroom research project, you are addressing the latter, in terms of problems within your decision-making domains, as suggested by Wallace (1998, p.23).

To identify the problem specifically for your research, you can start by recalling your personal past experience or analysing a video-recorded lesson of yours, and at the same time, consider the questions in *Moving Targets in Professional Learning*. Try to make a list of problems, and prioritize them according to what matters most to you at this stage of your professional learning.

### Suggested Procedures

1. List your perceived problems that you want to tackle in teaching, and rank order them in order to identify the major one for your classroom action research project.
2. Describe the nature of the problem with some data on the context(s) in which the problem is situated. Video-recording or audio-recording of your lesson can provide a factual basis for your initial analysis.
3. Explore the possible factors or reasons contributing to the problem. This understanding of the nature of the problem is most essential before you decide on tackling strategies.
4. Design strategies to address the problem in connection to your understanding of possible causes. This denotes your development in personal practical knowledge, as you have to refer to literature on the related teaching methods and your course notes from class discussion on campus, and at the same time, integrate your knowledge into practice. Your chosen strategies are grounded on your teaching theories as devices to validate and expand the theories.
5. Implement the strategies, and keep a record of notes in your Teaching Practice Log File on your actions, reflections, decisions on other strategies and further actions. Your reflections will initially involve a recall of salient facts in critical classroom episodes. Your peer partner can support you on this by active note-taking as an observer and as a critical friend. For evaluation of effectiveness of your strategies in various contexts, you can refer to the observation notes, students' performance in class work or other assignments, as well as their formal and informal feedback. When you have developed insights into the nature of the problem, you are ready to adopt other strategies to tackle the problem.
6. You should organise meetings with your peer partners and, if applicable, your collaborating teachers, for expansion of your problem-solving strategies. (Please refer to the sub-section

*Setting up a Schedule for Peer Coaching.*) Also, try to take advantage of the supervisory visits to discuss any queries with your practicum supervisor.

7. In the course of your action research, your focus on one problem as a start will not preclude you from addressing related problems. The interaction of problems and strategies will deepen your understanding of dilemmas and conflicts in classroom decisions as a professional learning process.
8. By the end of your practicum, review the data you have collected in your Teaching Practice Log File, analyse them and write up the report of your action learning for fulfillment of the assignment.

### **Learning Log**

1. Who/What is being researched? Does it help to have another pair of eyes?
2. Apart from independent work, what do you see as supportive resources for action research?
3. Does it help to have another pair of eyes?

### **Integrating Peer Support into Problem-Based Learning Cycles**

Teaching and learning are demanding not just intellectually, but also affectively. Often, it seems difficult to accept the challenges of unexpected outcomes, especially the negative ones, when one has made considerable effort to act rationally with careful planning. Rewards may not come readily, and learning to cope with puzzles is part of the process of professional learning.

By engaging in action research, you are creating problem-based learning cycles and being trained to be a reflective practitioner. Reflection is initially an individual and independent activity, but it can be extended to be a collective process, when peer support is introduced as a strategic resource. When breaking away from your isolation through peer coaching, you are involved in the frustration and joy of the learning process with enriched resources for thoughts and actions. It is important to utilize peer coaching as a support to your action research, and not as an extra task. In other words, you are learning to teach in a collaborative learning mode.

### **Setting up a Schedule for Peer Coaching**

The purpose of the peer coaching exercise is to maximise your professional development by engaging you in the process of reciprocal support in learning about teaching. During the practicum, you can practise two kinds of peer support – informally and formally.

**Informal peer coaching** is as natural and flexible as chatting over a cup of tea, discussing problems that have arisen so far or the next day lesson plans; asking for friendly advice; popping into the peer partner classroom whenever you have the chance, to observe and learn. This mutual helps develops into further talk, over more cups of tea, or whatever is conducive to the atmosphere of friendly discussion and sharing.

**Formal** peer-coaching requires exactly the same kind of peer rapport. However, the discussions and observation cycles must be put into a frame work of **week-long cycles** – merging the following timetable for peer coaching and the *Moving Targets in Professional Learning*.

This is only a suggested schedule which you and your peer partner can re-plan to suit your own practicum timetable. You can take it as an operational plan to engage in peer support for each other.

CYCLES	ACTION	DATA FOR REFLECTION
WEEK 1	Observe emerging problems	List problems from which to select some for learning cycle
↓		
WEEK 2 Peer A: Cycle 1	1. Pre-observation Discussion - 30 min.	Audio tape recording
	2. Peer A finalises lesson plan (and handouts if enough time available)	Final lesson plan
	3. Observation by Peer B	Observation notes
	4. Observation Data Analysis by Peer B	Questions to bring up
	5. Post-observation Discussion - 30 min.	Audio tape recording + Personal reflections
↓		
WEEK 3 Peer B: Cycle 1  Peer A: Try out Strategies	1. Pre-observation Discussion - 30 min.	Audio tape recording
	2. Peer B finalises lesson plan (and handouts if enough time available)	Final lesson plan
	3. Observation by Peer A	Observation notes
	4. Observation Data Analysis by Peer A	Questions to bring up
	5. Post-observation Discussion - 30 min.	Audio tape recording + Personal reflections
↓		
WEEK 4 Peer A: Cycle 2  Peer B: Try out Strategies	1. Pre-observation Discussion - 30 min.	Audio tape recording
	2. Peer A finalises lesson plan (and handouts if enough time available)	Final lesson plan
	3. Observation by Peer B	Observation notes
	4. Observation Data Analysis by Peer B	Questions to bring up
	5. Post-observation Discussion - 30 min.	Audio tape recording + Personal reflections
↓		
WEEK 5 Peer B: Cycle 2  Peer A: Try out Strategies	1. Pre-observation Discussion - 30 min.	Audio tape recording
	2. Peer B finalises lesson plan (and handouts if enough time available)	Final lesson plan
	3. Observation by Peer A	Observation notes
	4. Observation Data Analysis by Peer A	Questions to bring up
	5. Post-observation Discussion - 30 min.	Audio tape recording + Personal reflections
↓		
WEEK 6 Peer A: Cycle 3  Peer B: Try out Strategies	1. Pre-observation Discussion - 30 min.	Audio tape recording
	2. Peer A finalises lesson plan (and handouts if enough time available)	Final lesson plan
	3. Observation by Peer B	Observation notes
	4. Observation Data Analysis by Peer B	Questions to bring up
	5. Post-observation Discussion - 30 min.	Audio tape recording + Personal reflections

*\*All these data are to be included in the Appendix of the classroom action research assignment. You can also include other data such as critical incidents, students' feedback or supervisory comments which have stimulated you to make progress in professional learning.*

# An Illustration of Action Learning Cycles with Peer Support

Here is an example of recommended **problem-based learning cycles** created with data adapted from the classroom action research learning project of a former student teacher and model adapted from Kemmis & McTaggart, (1988). We have simply attempted to illustrate the typical decisions reached during the learning cycles. We have not recorded the process and flow of discussion that leads to these decisions, as the process and flow will be determined by the particular situation, relationship and progress of each peer pair.

## CYCLE 1

### Pre-Observation Discussion

#### Focus on a Problem

Many of my students are off-task when I give instructions. They talk amongst themselves or do other work. How can I get them back on task? Are the learning goals clear to myself and to the class? Am I building a rational sequence of teaching steps?

Agree to try out the following strategies:

1. Re-evaluate and develop supplementary material to suit the language level and interest of students.
2. Specify the lesson and task goals. Make them clear to the class.
3. Use questions that interest the students and encourage their response.

### Observation Task

Observe and record:

1. ST's instructions: the objectives of the lesson and various tasks.
2. ST's questions: purpose, to what extent do they encourage student response?

Draft lesson plan & pre-observation discussion

Action & lesson observation

Post-observation discussion & joint reflections

Personal reflections

### Post-Observation Discussion

#### Progress achieved

1. ST clarified key points to ensure that students understood.
2. ST stretched student knowledge with questions, new vocabulary and new facts.
3. ST had a pleasant and confident manner.

#### Problems emerging

1. There were many attempts to get students' response and confirmation of understanding by repeated 'yes?' or 'Okay?'.
2. Some students had not heard or understood several questions or explanations, resulting in confusion and off-task behaviour.

#### Personal Reflections\*

- Q: Can I deliver teacher talk at an appropriate pace, with adequate pauses and checking of students' response?
- Q: Can I organise the blackboard writing to support my explanations and class discussion?

(\* see *Moving Targets in Professional Learning 1.4*)

#### Strategies:

1. Make students repeat explanations and task instructions where necessary.
2. Ask questions to ensure all students have clearly understood what is expected at each stage.
3. Use blackboard when necessary.
4. Make students demonstrate the task.

## CYCLE 2

### Pre-Observation Discussion

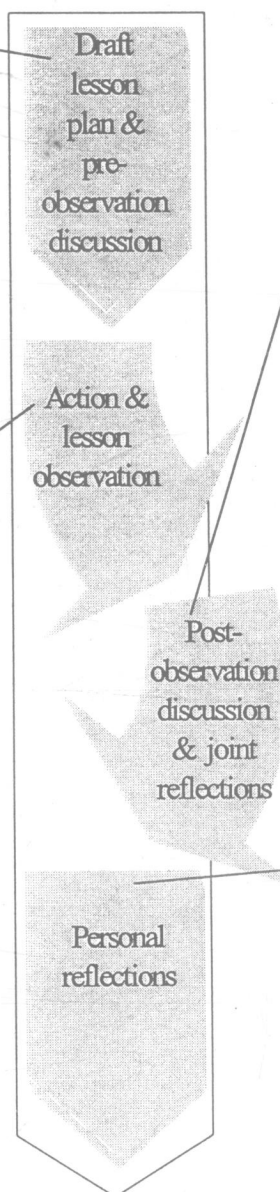
Agree to try the following strategies:

1. Focus more on students at the back and walk around the class while talking to keep their attention.
2. Add a simple task to prepare students for major task.
3. Modify the major task by contextualising it in a real life situation.

### Observation Task

Observe and record:

1. if ST checks all students' clear understanding of expectations at each stage, uses blackboard, instruction sheets or demonstrations.
2. if ST focuses more on students at the back and walks around to keep attention.
3. how students respond to the simple and major tasks.



### Post-Observation Discussion

#### Progress achieved

1. ST checked that all students had clearly understood various task objectives by questioning students and using students farthest away to demonstrate the task.
2. ST walked around to ensure all students were attentive and could hear her clearly.
3. The simple tasks succeeded in keeping students more involved, and prepared them for the major task.

#### Problems emerging

1. Too much time was spent on initial checking students' understanding. More capable students lost interest.
2. Not enough vocabulary work. Students were inadequately prepared for the major task which demanded the use of relevant vocabulary.

#### Personal Reflections\*

- Q: Can I attend to the pacing of the lesson?
- Q: Am I aware of progress and problems of students?
- Q: Can I ensure that my teacher talk in each episode of whole-class teaching is purposeful?

(\*see *Moving Targets in Professional Learning* 1.5, & 2.1)

Strategies:

Refer to relevant literature on the teaching of vocabulary and reading

## Workshop: Simulation on a Peer Conference

Get into pairs and identify yourselves as either a peer coach or a teacher.

Consider the questions in the *Moving Targets in Professional Learning*, and review a video playback of an episode of a lesson. Enter a pre-observation discussion for a start of a problem-based cycle:

1. Identify a problem for the teacher to focus.
2. Specify the observation tasks for the peer coach.

## **Learning Log**

In what context(s) might a full-time teacher be engaged in classroom action research?

### Teachers as Agents for Educational Reforms

After studying the application of action learning in the Hong Kong tertiary sector, Biggs and Lam (1997) concluded:

It is important to stress that improvement to teaching quality depends on teachers, not on procedures or even paradigms. Action learning provides a framework and a method of allowing teachers to reflect on their teaching so that they become more flexible and adaptive in their teaching.

### SECTION III: PEER RAPPORT-BUILDING FOR OPEN SHARING AND NON-JUDGEMENTAL FEEDBACK

- Rapport-Building as a Basis for Peer Coaching
- Rapport-Building for Effective Communication
- Setting Realistic Expectations for Peer Support

#### Rapport-Building as a Basis for Peer Coaching

With the assertion for peer coaching as a strategic resource for action research, it is important for you to build up the capacity for peer-coaching. This section focuses on rapport-building as a crucial basis for peer coaching. You will engage in workshops to train your sensitivity in rapport-building when providing peer support for each another.

##### *What is Rapport?*

*Rapport is present when people are responsive to one another. People are said to have rapport when each one sees what the other person is trying to say and... both feel comfortable with each other... saying exactly what they think or feel without worrying that they may be misunderstood or cause discomfort.*

#### Learning Log ✍

In pairs, consider yourself as a peer coach for each other by addressing the questions.

##### *Rapport-Building Questions To Ask Yourself*

*Can I be trustworthy, non-judgemental and dependable in some way which will be perceived by the other person?*

*Can I let myself experience positive attitudes towards this other person – attitudes of warmth, caring, liking, interest, respect?*

*Can I be acceptant of each facet of this other person as a teacher, which he/she presents to me?*

*Can I free him/her from the threat of external evaluation?*

*Can I let myself enter fully into the world of his/her feelings and personal meanings, and see these as he/she does?*

*Can I act with sufficient sensitivity in this relationship that my behaviour will not be perceived as a threat?*



## Rapport-Building for Effective Communication



### Role of the Peer Coach

As a peer coach, your basic role is to:

- agree on the focus of the observation during pre-observation discussion,
- maintain this focus during the lesson observation and note-taking, and
- use your observation notes as a basis for assisting the observed student teacher to note the progress, think about the problem, the reasons behind the problem and various strategies which can be tried out in the next lesson.

However, your position as the peer coach actually has far more significance than the three functions above.

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### **Learning Log**

As a peer coach, which of the following would be within your capacity to demonstrate in a discussion?

1. Evaluate your peer student teacher's performance critically.
  2. Encourage your peer student teacher by being focused, sensitive and non-judgmental.
  3. Empower the observed student teacher to develop strategies to tackle the problems identified.
  4. Convey your interest with a friendly manner, tone and language.
  5. Close down all channels of effective communication by being unfocused and /or dismissive with the manner, tone and language you use.
  6. Destroy the observed student teacher's confidence and morale by being judgmental.
- 

As the observer in a peer partnership, you are often regarded as one with the opportunity to observe your peer student teacher's performance critically. By choosing to be focused, sensitive and non-judgemental with the manner and use of language, you can be a very powerful learning support for your peer student teacher. You can assist the identification of problems, encourage experimentation and inspire strategies to face problems.

Conversely, you can also do the exact opposite and make peer coaching completely ineffective.

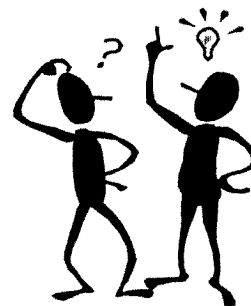
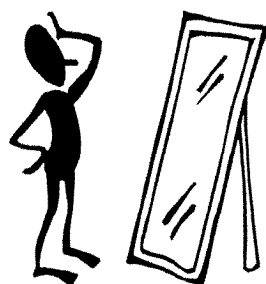
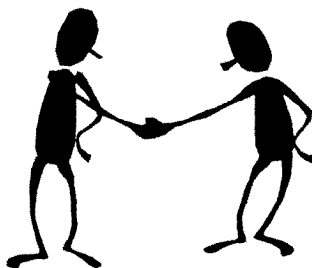
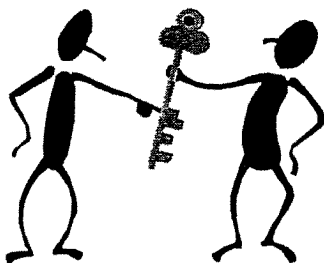
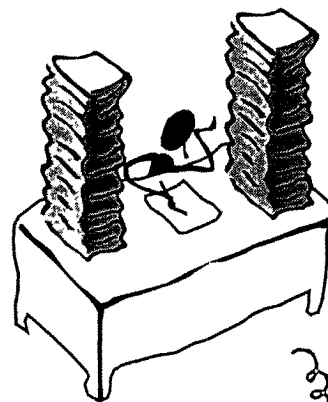
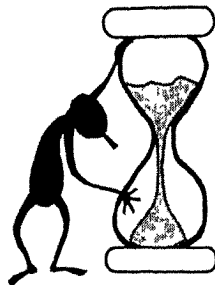
But, how do we decide how to behave? What does it mean by 'being focused, sensitive and non-judgemental'? How can we tell which words, facial expressions and tones are positive and which to avoid?

## Workshop: How Does it Feel?

Here are some simple exercises to help you discover the positive and negative effects of words, expressions and gestures. Be prepared to act out some of these scenes during class discussion.

Get into pairs, and imagine you are either the peer coach (*PC*) or the student teacher being observed (*ST*) in a peer conference. When your peer coach uses facial expressions, gestures and body posture; and/or the statements listed in sections 1 to 7 that follow, how would you rate your response or inner feelings on a scale of 1 to 5.

1	2	3	4	5
extremely relaxed	relaxed	unconcerned	tense	Extremely
pleased	pleased	neutral	depressed	Tense
confident	confident		confused	Depressed
clear sighted	clear sighted		defensive	confused
encouraged	encouraged		discouraged	defensive
				discouraged



# 1. Gestures & Tone of Voice:

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- (a) Your peer coach is busy reading her own lesson plan while you are describing your lesson plan to her. \_\_\_\_\_
- (b) Your peer coach listens intently while you try to come up with various ideas to remedy a problem. \_\_\_\_\_
- (c) The attention of your peer coach keeps wandering while you talk. \_\_\_\_\_
- (d) While you are describing lesson objectives and purpose of activities, your peer coach nods or makes sounds like “mmm”, or “aha”. \_\_\_\_\_
- (e) You have set an agreed time for the conference, but as the discussion begins, your peer coach keeps looking at the time. \_\_\_\_\_

## How Can I Show Interest Through Gestures & Sounds?

Listen actively, using appropriate posture and gestures to show you are listening. This is a very encouraging skill. Try not to get distracted or lose eye contact. Unless you understand your peer partner's perceptions, you will not be able to succeed in a joint exploration for teaching improvement.

# 2. Making A Good Start:

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- (a) *PC* : I think the overall ... was very good... you did very well. What do you think? \_\_\_\_\_
- (b) *PC* : Let's talk about your lesson [on] comparison today, mm...  
*ST* : (*interrupts*) What do you think about it?  
*PC* : I think the level of the activity was very suitable [for] most the students in this class...  
*ST* : (*interrupts*) Because they are very average? \_\_\_\_\_
- (c) *PC* : This was a pre-writing lesson. So, Anna, what do you think about your lesson?  
*ST* : I think in this lesson, I could prepare some of the important points [on how to write] application letters, [with] the students, for example, the contents,... Since the time was limited, I am afraid I could not give too many opportunities for the students to work on their own. Most of the [lesson] structure was to discuss things with the whole class...  
*PC* : Aha...  
*ST* : ...rather than giving them the chance to do it in their own groups or pairs.  
*PC* : So you don't think that there was enough variety of activities? \_\_\_\_\_
- (d) *PC* : I think, at the beginning of the lesson, you tried to put down the key word... 'advertisement'... that part was good because you tried to highlight, to give the focus to the students. Er, What about [showing materials] about this product? I think, then you can put [more words] down straight away after [that]. Actually, this way they can

really learn [a lot of] vocabulary. I know that you tried to put it down, but you can....  
And then..... (*goes on without allowing the ST to speak*)

### How Can We Make A Good Start?

Start by eliciting your peer partner's own feelings, inferences and opinions about the lesson. (e.g. "how do you feel about the lesson?") Let there be free flow of concerns. Agree and give brief positive feedback where you think it is appropriate.

Try not to jump straight into feedback of any sort, before you allow the peer partner to express feelings and opinions. Try not to force any directions on issues/problems which you see as important. You may see the issues/problems in a different light by engaging yourself receptively in the discussion.

## 3. The Importance of Observation Notes:

- (a) *ST* : ... that's why, before I played the tape of the pre-listening exercise, I showed the examples of the brochure ...  
*PC* : (*interrupts*) No, you played the [tape] first. Then you showed the brochure.  
*ST* : No, no  
*PC* : Yes, when [we went to the classroom, I asked what you [were doing] afterwards, you showed them some aids  
*ST* : Yes, I showed them the visual aids...  
*PC* : (*interrupts*) No because at that time...  
*ST* : No, no, no... \_\_\_\_\_.
- (b) *PC* : I noticed that some has done quite well, but I noticed that some of [the students] cannot fill in [the blanks], so then you played [the tape] again. So [had] you planned before, that you [would try and] play it again? \_\_\_\_\_
- (c) *PC* : You gave the students a contrast between the old ones and the new ones and I could see that the students were really interested, as if 'Wow, was this really 15 years ago?'. I can see that the students were on task. \_\_\_\_\_
- (d) *PC* : I think this was very interesting but what do you think of students' involvement in the task? Do you think they enjoyed it? What do you think of their participation when you walked around the classroom?  
*ST* : I think some [were] on task, but maybe some students were not. \_\_\_\_\_

## What Should We Discuss During The Post-Observation Conference?

Review only written data from the observation. It is essential to be as detailed as you can in your note-taking. Refer to the relevant data from your notes when bringing up questions about a problem. Consider the issues from your peer partner's viewpoints.

Try not to make any presuppositions about the observed teacher's intentions. Try not to set yourself as an example or try to shape the teacher into what you are.

## 4. Reaching For Understanding:

- (a) *PC* : I have a question ...some student may not see the direct connection between what has been taught before, and with this long grammatical explanation – it was quite a long time, maybe ten minutes – and some students may not be concentrating on your teaching and they may make noise so... is it better to use activities to relate the rules, for example, how to use...  
*ST* : Actually I did, but I'm not doing it in great volume, not playing very heavy stress on it.  
*PC* : Mmmm, Just a reminder... but it's good to ask them to ... see whether they know the basic requirement. \_\_\_\_\_
- (b) *PC* : [Perhaps you can] shift more from teacher-centred talk to the student-centred activities so they can do more [work on their own] instead of listening to you. \_\_\_\_\_
- (c) *PC* : I noticed that for your other lessons the students were very responsive.  
*ST* : Were they not responsive in this lesson?  
*PC* : No, not really  
*ST* : They're good students, but it's a scary thing... poetry. If [the teacher asks individual students] 'Well, what do you think?', [the class] just goes quiet. Everybody, whatever class, even if you are... So I just thought that they'll have some ideas if they could all talk together [in groups].  
*PC* : Yes, yes, I have noticed that they were not willing to [stand up] in front of the class, but they [were willing to] discuss amongst themselves." \_\_\_\_\_

## How Can We Reach For Understanding?

Paraphrase what your peer partner has been saying to clarify your understanding of the issues under discussion. Try not to let your personal views hinder your understanding.

Allow the observed teacher to reflect and offer his/her own coping strategies to tackle the perceived problems first, before you make any suggestions. Try not to give in to impulsive remarks or judgements; or rush to offer solutions.

## 5. Addressing Problems:

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- (a) *PC* : I think, personally think, you have too much .... perhaps it's better to... actually your task was adequate for me... but some students ... \_\_\_\_\_
- (b) *PC* : Maybe shift more from teacher-centred talk to the student-centred activities so they can do some more instead of listening to you.. \_\_\_\_\_
- (c) *PC* : You asked them to..., but um.. maybe the students don't know why they should .... Why didn't they just.... \_\_\_\_\_
- (d) *PC* : If some students stand up, but they don't know the answers, what would you do?  
*ST* : You mean when I asked them to give me the pattern, the structure...  
[Well] I had written the structure of the comparison on the board so I just reminded them by pointing to [it].  
*PC* : Maybe we can ... give them some clues, to look at the blackboard ...  
*ST* : Maybe the blackboard [work] is a bit messy.  
*PC* : More organised [blackboard work] is better, but you have good use of the blackboard, used quite often... \_\_\_\_\_

### How Can I Address Problem Areas or Situation?

Prompt your peer partner to consider the problems observed by asking neutral, probing questions to get them to continue reflection. Try not to make judgemental statements that may sound like blames and cause defensive reactions.

When addressing a problem, make a reflective statement using “I” or “we” statements rather than “you” messages. Try not to use confrontational language or make accusations when you want to clarify any action of the peer partner.

Pause regularly to allow the peer partner to think about what you have said, confirm/deny it, and then clarify specific points when necessary. It is important to respect the peer partner's time for reflections. Try to avoid rushing on with your own comments or statements; or talk unnecessarily to fill in silent gaps.

## 6. Ending the Conference:

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- (a) *ST* : Well, I don't know... when I have to teach grammar... I have to teach them the theory first, I think. And [perhaps] then they can do the exercise  
*PC* : Yes, and [perhaps] then they can do the exercise.  
*ST* : Maybe next time I'll use more activities.  
*PC* : And shift more from the teacher-centred talk to student-centred activity, so that they do some more instead of listening to you. And that's all.  
*ST* : Okay, thank you. \_\_\_\_\_

- (b) **PC** : Now overall, you have a very clear voice and appropriate pacing, and also very firm dealing with the classroom management. That was very good. we have to do something about the discipline.  
**ST** : Not very firm, I think, because [the students] are still very noisy. Maybe I smile a lot.  
**PC** : Maybe too friendly to them sometimes... maybe later we have to [work on] to deal with this classroom problem.  
**ST** : "I think so. \_\_\_\_\_"
- (c) **PC** : I could use this in my lesson... Will it be boring, if I use the same ... ?  
**PC**  
**& ST**: Yes, yes,.. we can do that. \_\_\_\_\_ (*abrupt end to discussion*)
- (d) **PC** : Good timing and good class management and ... excellent work  
**ST** : Thanks. That's the lot? Thank you, that's the end! OK? \_\_\_\_\_

### How Should We End The Discussion Constructively?

Be prepared to continue the discussion on the problems identified in another session. Deal with related problems in each cycle. Such cycles with peer support can provide the basis for your classroom action research.

However, try not to, as far as possible, allow the problems of each session to go untackled, even though a perfect solution is not available. Alternatives strategies must be suggested and pursued before an effective solution can be identified.

## 7. Effective Communication?

- (a) **PC** : I think, for the activity, first of all, we listened to the tape. But I think, at that time, students were not ready. Actually it's after PE lesson and most of them were very tired. I think, for listening, we shouldn't just listen to the tapes. Meanwhile, the teacher should teach the students something, for example, the pre-listening exercise or saying something related, before we move to the topic of listening \_\_\_\_\_
- (b) **PC** : You wanted them to achieve this objective ... so you chose [the tape]. You used the listening first. \_\_\_\_\_
- (c) **PC** : ... but while I was observing the lesson.. actually I'm not very sure. actually, I just think that it was something about a barbecue, and about the holiday, and about the food they bring. \_\_\_\_\_
- (d) **ST** : Maybe it's just the terminology they don't understand...  
**PC** : They know how to use it? ...

**ST** : Yes, which is good. But it's a little bit harder when you have to teach adverbial clauses.

**PC** : What do you think about terminology? Do you think [it] is really important?

### Learning Log

Choose one of the episodes and write down how, as the PC, you can bring up the problems in a more sensitive and encouraging manner.

### Group Discussion

Refer to the list *Student-Teachers' Views on the Benefits and Problems for Peer Coaching* in Section I, how do you now view the problems?

### Setting Realistic Expectations for Peer Support

Peer coaching is a way to build a learning community for professional teaching. While there is potential to be developed from learning about learning together, it is also worth noting the constraints and how you can position yourselves.

1. There could be match or mismatch of peers as partners in this learning process due to personality difference. Differences may be a cause of painful adjustment at the beginning. You are encouraged to commit to this helping relationship to make it work as far as possible for the limited duration of time. Often, it is helpful to look at the positive side and see your differences as an enriching factor to widen your scope of thinking.
2. You may find yourselves struggling at different stages of your professional learning. Avoid being judgemental of yourself or your partner by identifying who is superior or who is inferior in teaching effectiveness. Your goal is not to strive to be 'better' than your peer partner, but to be learning to become better than yourselves respectively. Even if it is obvious that one is more advance than the other, learning from mutual help is still significant.
3. Be prepared for a range of your moods and at the same time, be open about the depth of your rapport with each other. Avoid comparing your peer partner with your last one in the former period of practicum. Try to accept that every relationship is unique, and you just have to cultivate it with the best spirit.
4. Often, critical incidents are most testing of you. When there is any breakdown in communication, do not quit. Take a deep breath, and try again. The difficulty may be partly due to stress or frustration in the process of trying out new ideas. It may not always come to our awareness that when we are stressed, we tend to be irritable and to subconsciously look for someone else to blame. An expression of frustration can be mistakenly taken as a blame on the recipient, while it is the frustrated person who is confused and needs support. When both peer partners are in that emotional state, the situation is likely to get explosive.



5. The suggested procedures in this document are there to help operationalize peer coaching as a useful support to you, but should not restrict you from creative enhancement of your support for each other. You will learn in different tracks, provided that you are open and accepting of challenges. Your commitment to mutual support is much more than any documentary description can achieve.
6. The peer coach will explore jointly with you concerning strategies to cope with problems. As the teacher of your own students, you have to be responsible for your chosen decisions and strategies to tackle emerging problems. While you are receptive to views and suggestions from external observers, including your practicum supervisor, try to see them as given to support you in your action research. External observation are meant to make you more alert of your scenario and possibilities, but should not undermine your own search of knowledge in your professional learning process.
7. Expect new problems in your search, and avoid looking for a comfortable position by jumping to a simplistic solution. Peer coaching will work only if both of you contribute to rapport-building and a joint inquiry in the course of professional learning.

## Section IV: PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AS A DIRECTION-ORIENTED PROCESS

- Towards Theory-Practice Integration
- A Framework for a Direction-Oriented Process of Professional Learning
- Applying the Framework to Peer Coaching

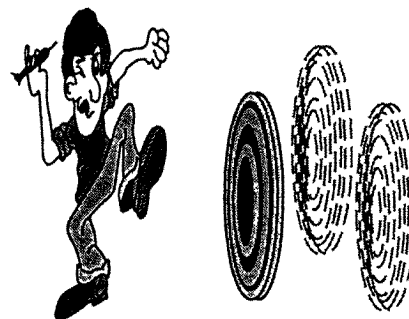
### Towards Theory-Practice Integration

With your various modules of course work on campus, you have been somewhat conceptually prepared for teaching. However, when plunging into the classroom reality, you may find yourself facing multiple demands with little capacity to address theories. What is the relationship between theory and practice? What is the relevance of your course work to your practicum work? These are challenges to your approach to professional learning as well as to the design of the curriculum. This document therefore has been intended to provide you with a structure for the practicum experience from which you will learn to bring together theory and practice, and to create a positive environment for professional learning.

### A Framework for a Direction-Oriented Process of Professional Learning

So far, you have considered how to generate problem-based learning cycles for action research, and how to build rapport with your peer partners for open sharing and non-judgmental feedback to each other. This section addresses professional learning as a continual process with renewed goals, during which you are encouraged to query your practice with theoretical concerns. You are helped to build a vision for this direction-oriented process with a suggested framework *Moving Targets in Professional Learning*. It has been derived from a synthesis of my consideration of models of learning to teach and professional development (Fuller 1969; Berliner 1988; Kagan 1992) and my own research (Kwo, 1994; 1996) in observing student teachers' various signs of progress in practicum. As presented in the form of clusters of questions which reiterate pedagogical concerns at various stages of your development in professional learning, this framework will provide a viable language for you to support each other as peers, and at the same time, encourage individuals to theorize teaching in the light of practical experience. In contrast with an external set of criteria for assessing teaching performance, this framework is intended to help you engage in problem-based professional learning, and enhance an open and non-judgmental culture where you can collaboratively raise further questions in search for professional development. In essence, the framework underpins the assertion of the POND culture as an objective device for steering your professional learning with a sense of progress.

If problems can be taken as opportunities for learning, such a list of targets in the form of questions can be taken as a professional learning school that you can go up and down like entering different floors and rooms for your focused attention. Though the questions are arranged sequentially as moving targets with a sense of progression, you are free to decide how you wish to shape your learning by revisiting some rooms for as long as you like, or skipping some to have a fresh focus.



Who will ask the questions? You as the teacher involved in the dynamics of professional learning will primarily identify the questions for your focus. As illustrated in Section II, your peer coach (and where applicable, your collaborating teacher) will help you to clarify your focus for various stages of your professional learning. At the end of the practicum, you may not have covered the consideration of all the questions, but you will have got sufficient practice to get used to asking your own questions to guide your continual development beyond the practicum. Hopefully you will also have developed a sense of self-efficacy for problem-solving. For the future, you will enhance your professional development by revisiting this framework of *Moving Targets in Professional Learning*.

## Applying the Framework to Peer Coaching

As suggested in Section II, peer coaching can be operationalized in cycles of action learning, when the peer coach can assist you to consider an identified problem, observe your lesson with collection of intended data, and explore with you in a post-lesson conference on how to tackle emerging problems. Now, with the help of video-recorded data and lesson plans of student teachers in the past, you are going to take a closer look at how you as a peer coach can facilitate a cycle of action learning with reference to the *Moving Targets in Professional Learning*. (You are encouraged to be imaginative in the simulation exercises, which are designed to prepare you for peer coaching by putting into practice a synthesis of skills in rapport-building, observation and conferencing. This set of simulations is limited to only one cycle of problem-based learning.)

### Workshop: Simulation on Pre-Observation Conferencing

1. Get into pairs by sitting next to your peer partner who is placed with you in the same school for your forthcoming practicum. For simulation, identify who is going to be the observed teacher, and who is going to be the peer coach.

2. Observation and note-taking:

Observe a segment of a video-recorded lesson, and take notes on what is going on in the lesson. Your note-taking should be as detailed as you can.

After the observation, you can compare your notes and discuss:  
What difficulties do you encounter in note-taking?

3. Simulation on pre-observation conference:

Assuming that one of you were the teacher in the video-recorded lesson, given your state of progress, you are going to identify a focus for your professional learning in the forthcoming observed lesson. In a pre-observation conference, together with the peer coach, you will refer to the *Moving Targets in Professional Learning*, and identify a set of questions you wish to address in the forthcoming lesson. The peer coach will take the lead in conducting the conference by practising rapport-building skills.

In this pre-observation conference, you are also given a lesson plan for the forthcoming observed lesson. The peer coach will check with you your intentions behind lesson-planning. This discussion is essential to ensure that the peer coach is able to follow the lesson with reasonable perception and understanding of what is going on in the lesson. In the process, the

By the end of the conference, the peer coach should be well-informed of the lesson plan and the precise focus for taking observation notes.

This is a critical part of peer coaching. The peer observer must collect this information through observation and then use it to guide the teacher through the post-observation conference. The data are persuasive by nature, on the basis of which the teacher can reflect on the lesson, and come to a new awareness of how improvement can take place.

- Persuasive data contains no value judgements. It must be pure observation data and completely non-judgmental.
- Persuasive data must also be specific and presented in a form that is immediately understood and used by the teacher.
- Persuasive data must be data that the teacher feels are necessary and important at a given time.
- While observing, it is important for the peer observer to resist the temptation to form inferences and generalisations about the activity. However, it is important to record those observed data that may later help lead the teacher to their own inferences.

The notes the peer coach takes on this form, using the symbols [ o ], [ ✓ ] and [ ? ], will provide a persuasive data base for subsequent analysis of teaching. At the post-observation discussion with the teacher, the peer coach can refer to salient facts objectively.

[illegible]

### [ o ] Perceived purposes

- Identify the lesson objectives (the teacher's possible intentions) as observed and what you see as the pedagogical principles the teacher has incorporated into teaching.
- Try to interpret them from the teacher's perspective.
- At this stage, focus on UNDERSTANDING and refrain from evaluating.

### [ ✓ ] Strengths

- Analyse the underlying schema. Discuss what you see as the pedagogical principles that the teacher has demonstrated (i.e. engaging the students, lesson planning, how to teach writing) Do you think the intended objectives have been achieved?
- Be sensitive to the teacher's strengths and progress in the context of the agreed focal point. For example:
  - material and design of the task
  - interaction between the teacher and students
  - learning achievements and problems
  - pacing of various activities

### [ ? ] Perceived problems

- As an observer, you may not understand the nature of a problem while the lesson is in progress. You can mark down any points worthy of later discussion.
- Explore the nature of the problem by referring to the recorded observation data.

### Learning Log

You are going to observe a video-recorded lesson of the same teacher. Refer to the joint decisions in your simulated pre-observation conference, practise observation and simultaneous note-taking, bearing in mind the selected focus on the provided observation form.

### Post-Observation Conferencing

This is a discussion after the lesson during which both the teacher and the peer observer can reflect on the lesson together in a collegial manner. The peer observer must withhold personal judgements. The goal is to facilitate the teacher's recall, analysis and evaluation of the lesson.

A good peer conference can enrich the thinking of both the teacher and the peer coach, and enable them to reach a high-level awareness of the nature of the problems, before they can strive for creative ways to tackle them.

## Positive Conferencing (McAllister & Neubert, 1995)

### (a) Praise Comments

What went well in the lesson and why. This is a most important start, and can build the teacher's strength.

### (b) Questions

Clarifying questions: asked when the peer observer doesn't understand something that has happened during the lesson or something said during the conference.

Eliciting questions: asked by the peer observer to prompt the teacher to explore alternatives.

### (c) Polish

Suggestions or recommendations, if any, in the form of mediational questions or reflective statements.

*Ask Mediational Questions:* A good peer observer asks mediational questions that are directed towards engaging the thinking processes. While good peer observers do ask a lot of questions, it is the quality of the questions, not the number, that is significant.

*Make reflective statements (not accusations):*  
Avoid using statements that start with the word



#### WHAT THINKING PROCESSES DO THESE QUESTIONS PROMOTE?

- ◇ *When has something like this been done before?*
- ◇ *How is this different from that?*
- ◇ *When does this need to be said/done/\_\_\_\_\_?*
- ◇ *What could the problem be?*
- ◇ *How can we find out the reason?*
- ◇ *What should be done next?*
- ◇ *Can we think of other ways that these objectives can be achieved?*
- ◇ *What would happen if \_\_\_\_\_?*

"You" – "You did..."; "You said..." Instead, try to use "I" messages in the passive voice – "I noted that the question being asked was a bit unclear." "I observed that the instructions were not being understood." If it seems impossible not to say "you" in a statement, use "we" instead as this indicates a shared or common problems; and is less threatening.

These approaches may seem a bit forced at first. However, with practice, you will find that the teacher feels less threatened and more open to analysing and reflection on the problem issue being discussed. This is because there is no blame or accusation directed at the teacher or his/her actions, but rather a statement or question posed on the occurrence of a problem.

## **Workshop: Simulation on Post-Observation Conferencing**

Now, both of you will review your observation notes. The 'teacher' will have to be imaginative about the intention of the teacher in the video-recorded lesson, whereas the 'peer coach' will have to be appreciative of the commendable effort made by the 'teacher' and alert of emerging problems by addressing the persuasive data. The peer coach will lead the conference by practising the suggestive conferencing skills.

At the end of the conference, try to discuss how you feel about your rapport and whether you have helped each other learn new perspectives.

## **Consolidation: Quality Enhancement in the Teaching Practicum**

Review this document, the personal learning logs, the class discussion, the workshops and the simulation exercises. Discuss in groups:

1. your understanding of:
  - (a) teachers as learners
  - (b) a positive frame and culture for professional learning (POND)
  - (c) classroom action research as a tool in teacher preparation
  - (d) rapport-building with your peer partner
  - (e) classroom observation in support of data-collection
  - (f) conferencing and reflectivity
  - (g) theory-practice integration
  - (h) professional learning as a direction-oriented process
2. for each item listed, your perception of the challenges in the forthcoming teaching practicum, and
3. your strategies to cope with the challenges.

## A LEARNING FRAME: MOVING TARGETS IN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

### DEVELOPING A WORKABLE ROUTINE

#### 1. Teacher performance

##### 1.1 *Can I master the basic skills in lesson-planning?*

Can I specify the goals clearly on the basis of which I can evaluate my lesson?

Can I describe rationally the sequence of teaching steps with a reasonable estimate of time distribution?

Can I evaluate and improve the teaching material, and develop supplementary material, where necessary?

##### 1.2 *How accurate and resourceful is my subject knowledge?*

(In the case of language teachers: language model in grammar, vocabulary, spelling and pronunciation; caution on the inconsistency of English grammar rules; readiness to let students learn about ambiguities and irregularities of rules through authentic material; creation of contexts for communicative language practice so that rules are not treated in isolation).

##### 1.3 *Can I develop a positive rapport with my students?*

How are my facial expression, gestures and body posture?

Can I maintain eye contact with my students?

##### 1.4 *Can I deliver my teacher talk at an appropriate pace, with adequate pauses and checking of students' response?*

Can I organise the blackboard writing to support my explanation and the class discussion?

Can the teacher talk be strengthened with appropriate use of other techniques (e.g. quick drawing, dramatic expressions, wit, humour, cheerful smiles, music, personal collection of real objects)?

Can I introduce teaching aids which facilitate learning?

##### 1.5 *Can I develop a basic competence in classroom organisation and time management?*

Can I introduce appropriate classroom organisation patterns in encouraging students' work?

Can I secure students' attention before giving further guidance in the midst of their work?

Can I attend to the pacing of the lesson? How is my time distribution for various activities?

#### 2. Switch from teaching as an act of telling, to teaching as a process of organising learning

##### 2.1 *What are the assumptions about learning behind my teacher talk?*

What are the teacher's roles in different episodes of a lesson?

How can the lesson be planned with appropriate teacher input and adequate opportunities for students to work on the language?

How can I ensure that my teacher talk in each episode of whole-class teaching is purposeful (e.g. for organising learning, clarifying concepts or providing feedback)?

How can teacher talk be related to other activities?

##### 2.2 *What are the problems in this switch-process? How can I tackle them?*

Is it possible to turn teachers' extensive explanation to students' tasks? How do I see the experience of attending teacher talk from the perspective of the students? (How much can students get out of my teacher talk?)



- 2.3 *What is the meaning of classroom discipline?*  
 What do I expect from students when attending teacher talk?  
 How can I train students to be disciplined in learning with quality teacher talk?  
 How can I turn students from a "listening" mode to a "thinking and working mode"?  
 Am I aware of progress and problems of students? In what ways can I check their understanding and learning attainment?
- 2.4 *What is the hidden curriculum in the way I behave in the lesson?*  
 What have I suggested to students as the target goal in learning: to please the teacher, or to be responsible and committed to their own learning?
- 2.5 *In the light of students' response, or lack of response, how can I improve the design of a task?*  
 How can I use the textbook material critically and creatively?  
 Can I make good use of the teaching aids to reinforce learning? Can they be more thoroughly exploited for various purposes?

### FROM ROUTINES TO VARIATION: REFLECTIVE TEACHING AND ACTION LEARNING

3. **Recognition of dilemmas in decision-making**
  - 3.1 What are my dilemmas in making my teaching decisions (e.g. reward vs punishment, teacher talk vs student talk, teacher inputs vs student achievement...)?
  - 3.2 What are the constraints that could possibly have inhibited a successful experimentation of the approach that I have been well convinced in theory (e.g. collaborative learning)? With my persistence, what are the other strategies I should attempt?
  - 3.3 What aspects of the lesson am I not satisfied with? Despite my effort and good intention, how did I get into the 'puzzles'? What was the nature of the problem? What can I do about it in the next lesson?
4. **Variation in teacher language / styles: towards intensive interaction with students**
  - 4.1 Can I vary my language / styles of interaction so as to match with students' levels to secure their attention in class? Can I make strategic use of pauses and change of volume / tone of my voice at appropriate moments to heighten students' attention on problematic parts?
  - 4.2 In open class discussion, am I ready to anticipate student responses, maintain encouraging eye contact with students, *listen* and acknowledge their contributions in order to help them attain higher levels of thinking
  - 4.3 Can I introduce multiple patterns of classroom communication in open class discussion as well as in group work, through which students are encouraged to *listen* to and interact with one another, not only to the teacher, in order to think more deeply about the issues in focus? (Can the teacher avoid playing the loudspeaker for individual students in open class discussion?)
  - 4.4 How can I give specific instruction and steering / monitoring inputs to get groups into dynamic work?

## **5. Variation in task-design**

- 5.1 How can I develop creativity in my task-design? Can I look for different ways to approach the topic of the lesson by addressing the problematic parts from the students' perspectives? Can I give students adequate guidance? How can I ensure a balance of challenge and support?
- 5.2 In designing sequence of activities / tasks, how can I ensure the linkage between activities so that they can be ready for higher challenges in the later stage of the lesson?
- 5.3 Can I introduce higher-order thinking in my task-design?

## **6. From student involvement to student achievement**

- 6.1 Can I move beyond the concern for students' participation, and become more alert about evaluation of their learning achievements?
- 6.2 Can I manage teaching materials and lesson plans with an overview of the programme schedule and students' progress? Can I give attention to students' diversity in response as a whole class, disruptive as well as passive students?
- 6.3 How much do I understand about students' strengths and weaknesses, their progress or lack of expected progress? Can I help students as individuals to improve themselves from where they are?
- 6.4 When providing feedback to students, can I help students to learn from their mistakes? What could be the cause(s) for their mistakes? What can be done to reinforce their learning?
- 6.5 Can I introduce variation in provision of feedback with concerns for efficiency and effectiveness?

## **7. Spontaneity, sense of efficacy and action learning**

- 7.1 What do I notice about students' responses and learning problems? Can I respond to unanticipated problems? Can I confront the problems by changing the course of action in the lesson? What are the costs and benefits from my spontaneous decisions?
- 7.2 Am I alert with pending decisions? For instance, before the end of the lesson, can I decide how to conclude the lesson without going beyond the bell? Even if it is absolutely necessary to go beyond the bell, can I ensure students' support for this decision?
- 7.3 Can I manage heavier teaching load with due attention to efficiency and effectiveness?
- 7.4 Am I persistent in problem-solving? Even when "puzzles" cannot be resolved or addressed on the spot, can I continue to explore further to identify the nature of the problems?
- 7.5 With my extended understanding about the relationship between teaching and learning, can I develop a sense of self-efficacy? Can I make continual improvement by tackling the problems?
- 7.6 Can I develop a capacity to *enjoy* the challenges of teaching, and take them as opportunities for further development? Can I bring students together by building a lively and friendly classroom atmosphere? Can I help students to *enjoy* learning?
- 7.7 Can I work collaboratively with my peers in material development and evaluation of student responses? Can I learn to appreciate different viewpoints and gain insights into my teaching by recognizing variation of teaching styles?

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